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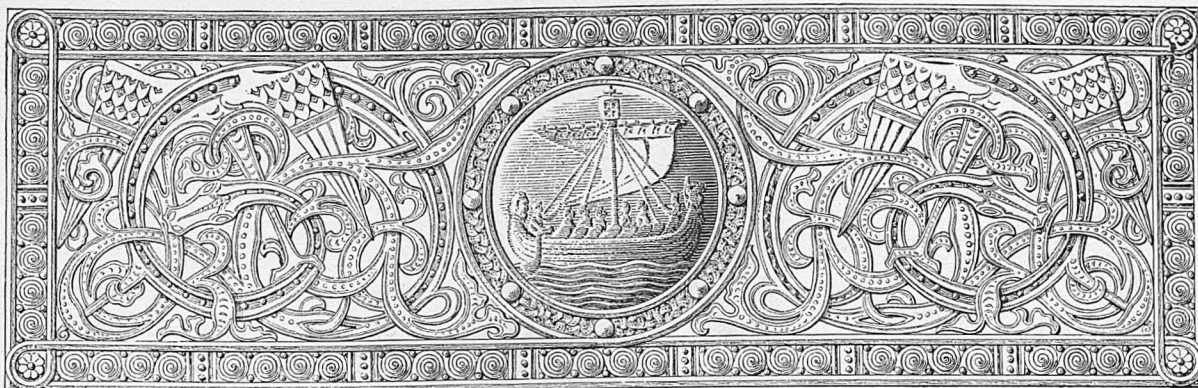


W. M. HUNT, PINX.

W. J. LINTON, DEL. ET SC.

PORTRAIT OF MR. ALLAN WARDNER.

Original in the Possession of Mrs. W. M. Evarts, New York.



DESIGNED FOR THE AMERICAN ART REVIEW BY LUDWIG S. IPSSEN.

WILLIAM MORRIS HUNT.

I.—PERSONAL REMINISCENCES.

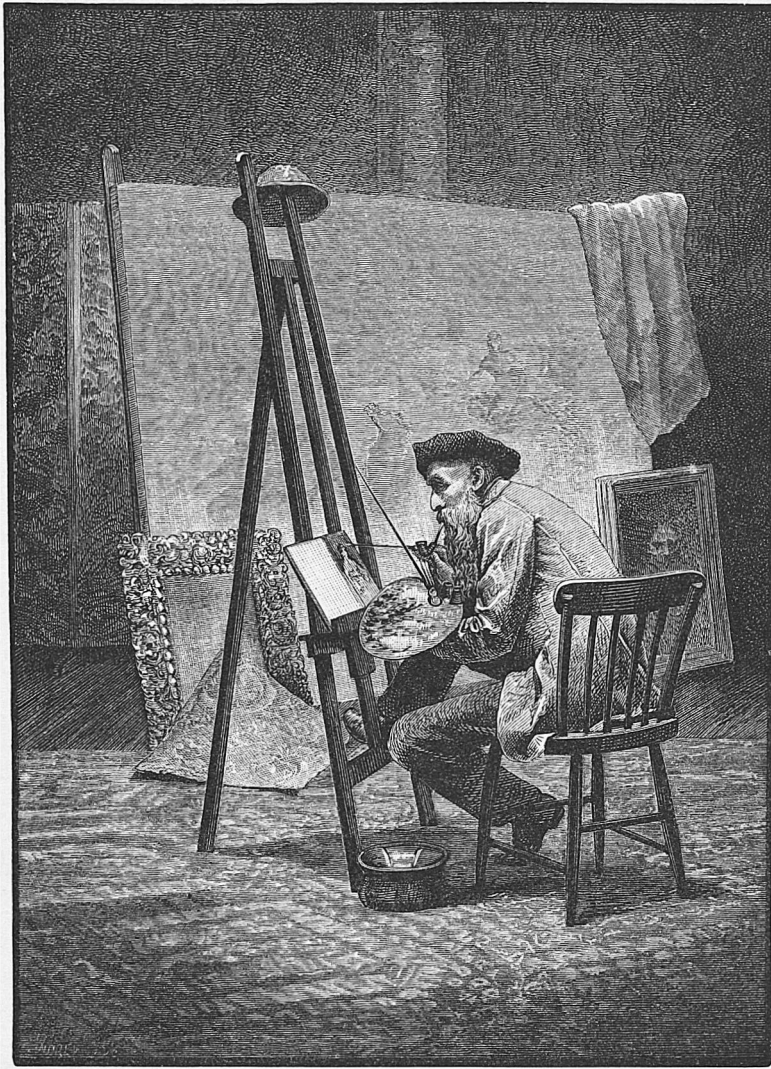


DESIGNED BY L. S. IPSSEN.

WITH the superb collection of Mr. Hunt's works in the Museum of Fine Arts at Boston, which will have been thrown open to the public by the time these lines appear in print, the sad fact that he is indeed gone, that his work is done, which until now it has been hardly possible to realize, forces itself upon us to its fullest extent. He left us in the spring-time, never to return. He died in the early autumn, and they laid him to rest, as he desired, in his native place. No memorial service has been held in his honor in the city where he lived and was loved, and where his loss is sincerely mourned. But nothing we could have done would have been so appropriate, so fitting a tribute to his memory, or so consonant with his character, as this

Memorial Exhibition. With sincere admiration in my heart for the dear man to whom so many of us are indebted for the first clear ideas of the good and high qualities of art, I will attempt to give a brief sketch of his brilliant career and work.

William Morris Hunt was born in Brattleborough, Vermont, on March 31st, 1824. His father was a noted judge, his mother a woman of rare mental power and force of character. The high distinction which all her sons have won in the professions of architecture, painting, and law proves the worth of her influence. Young Hunt entered Harvard College at the age of sixteen; but, on account of ill health, he left his class before it graduated. At the age of twenty-two, in 1846, we find him beginning his artistic studies at the academy of Düsseldorf, with the intention of becoming a sculptor; but, after a stay of only nine months, he removed to Paris, attracted by the fame of the celebrated sculptor Pradier. Upon his arrival there, he found the master abroad in Italy, and, not wishing to remain idle, he acted upon the advice of Couture, to whom he had been introduced, and entered that artist's studio as a pupil, although it was still his intention to follow the study of sculpture on the return of Pradier to Paris. The Atelier Couture was at that time the most popular in France. The wonderful success of the great picture, *The Romans of the Time of the Decadence*, now in the Luxembourg Gallery, turned the heads of all the young men, who declared the artist another Veronese, and upheld his work and methods with the most enthusiastic demonstrations. Mr. Hunt soon distinguished himself in his



W. M. HUNT IN HIS STUDIO IN MERCANTILE BUILDING.

ENGRAVED BY ANDREW, FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

three hundred francs, an absurdly low price, considering the artist's after reputation. Millet was at that time wretchedly poor, and almost unknown; yet Mr. Hunt not only continued to buy his pictures to the extent of his power, but also prevailed upon his friends to buy, and made himself unhappy because he could not acquire everything Millet painted. This is an important fact in Mr. Hunt's life, as it shows his penetration and his keen discernment of artistic worth and power in a man whom the world did not recognize until many years later. The estimate in which Millet was then held by the pupils of the École des Beaux-Arts is shown by an anecdote which, although not fresh, may be worth repeating. When some one asked Couture what had become of Hunt, "Humph!" said he, "he has gone down there to Barbizon with that Millet, who paints peasants so poor that they can't afford even a wrinkle in their pantaloons!" Millet received a medal of the second class in the Salon of 1853; but, notwithstanding this and the splendid articles written in his favor by Gautier, in 1855 or before, his pictures remained on his hands, and he found little favor with the government or his countrymen until a few years before his death, which occurred in February, 1875, in his sixtieth year. It may be truly said, therefore, that to Mr. Hunt belongs the honor of bringing Millet into notice, and more especially of making him known to Americans.¹

¹ Boston is fortunate in possessing many of Millet's finest and most celebrated paintings. Those in the collection of Mr. Quincy A. Shaw, Mr. Martin Brimmer, and Mr. Brooks, are among the best of his works.

new sphere, and painted some of the most wonderful and fascinating studies ever produced by any pupil of his then master. Diaz, the great landscape-painter, only a short time before his death, which occurred about two years ago, spoke of him with warm admiration to an American artist, saying that he remembered him as the brightest, most charming and talented young man he had ever known. He was a pet with *le patron*, an admired and loved leader among his fellow-students. *La vie bohème*, with all that the name implies, reigned supreme in the old Latin quarter then, and the art students were never backward in seizing the occasion to enjoy any fun that was going forward. The figure of the young American became well known in those crooked, quaint old streets, through which he used to drive a tandem team in fine style.

But Mr. Hunt did not remain long under the influence of Couture. He became the friend and pupil of a much greater man, Jean François Millet, whose picture of *The Sower* he bought for

The French peasant-painter's influence over Mr. Hunt was great, and affected his style and choice of subject through life. It has been said that "he worshipped the name of Thomas Couture, and taught hundreds of his countrymen to worship it." This I know to be an error. Mr. Hunt, in some fine table-talk, recently said, very emphatically, that Couture's system never made a painter nor a school; and it is a singular fact, that, out of all the brilliant company of talented young painters whom Couture attracted,—and he did attract the most talented of his time,—it would be difficult to find one who has attained great eminence, or received any higher distinction than a medal of the second or third class. To the artist friends of Mr. Hunt it is certainly well known that he fought Couture's influence for twenty years and more; and how well he succeeded in his own case in throwing it off, his later pictures give ample proof to those who are competent to judge.

In the year 1855, Mr. Hunt returned to America, and his marriage to Miss Louisa Perkins, of Boston, took place soon after. His first studio was in Newport, where he painted some fine studies and *genre* pictures. It was probably here that Mr. John La Farge became acquainted with Mr. Hunt, whose influence over him was very marked. From Newport he was invited to come to Boston to paint the portrait of Chief Justice Shaw, a work which assured his reputation, and marks the era of his success. It was his first portrait of any note in America, and was received with acclamation. It may be interesting to note here, that, only a few years ago, Fremier, the celebrated French sculptor, when shown a photograph from this painting, pronounced it, without hesitation, the work of a master.

Mr. Hunt now determined upon a permanent residence in Boston, and took a studio in Tremont Street, in a building owned by Mr. Joseph Burnett, from which he subsequently removed to the Studio Building, on Tremont Street, corner of Bromfield Street. His studio and gallery there were the great attractions to visitors who came to the "receptions" given by the artists in the building. The stirring picture, *The Bugle Call*, painted in Newport, was exhibited here; the drawing of *The Drummer Boy*, which attracted great crowds while on exhibition in Messrs. Williams and Everett's window, was conceived and executed here. Its motto, "To arms! To arms!" found a response in the mood of the citizens, who were burning with patriotic ardor. I think this was just after the firing upon Fort Sumter, in 1861. About this time Mr. Hunt removed to the Mercantile Building, on Summer Street, which was subsequently burned in the great fire of 1872. Many sketches, fine pictures, and portraits were destroyed by this calamity; but of all these Mr. Hunt sincerely regretted only several superb paintings and studies by his dear master, Millet, which he kept always before him, and his own early studies. In the Mercantile Building some of Mr. Hunt's best works were executed,—*The Listeners*, and other well-known *genre* works, besides a long list of his famous portraits, including those of President Lincoln and Governor Andrew, and of a great number of ladies and gentlemen of the best society in this city and elsewhere.

It was while Mr. Hunt was established in this studio that I first made his acquaintance, in the year 1864. As I look back now to that pleasant time, it seems to me that he appeared then very much as he did when he left us. He must have been prematurely gray, but he never seemed old. I never met a more magnetic man. He was terribly in earnest in his work, whatever it might be, and excited one's enthusiasm to the highest pitch. I shall always remember how he looked and talked under the skylight in the old Mercantile Building, illustrating, with a rough little cast from the Column of Trajan in his hand, the principle of breadth in treating light and shadow. He taught me in five minutes the principle of perhaps the greatest importance in painting; and although I never came under his influence to the extent which some young aspirants in art have since enjoyed, I am nevertheless proud to say that I consider myself his pupil, for I am sure I should have done nothing without his encouragement.

In this same studio, also, he gave a number of receptions, which surpassed anything of the kind ever known in Boston before. His cartoon of *The Flight of Night*,—the same subject

which he has painted on one of the walls of the Capitol at Albany,—and several repetitions on large canvases, in different states of preparation, together with small color studies for this composition, occupied a large part of the studio. Opposite the great cartoon stood the *Hamlet*, a powerful and fascinating picture, painted in a great measure from Mr. Bandmann, the actor, but never finished. There was also the beautiful portrait of Mrs. Richard Hunt with her child in her arms,—one of the most finished and striking of his works of this kind. The figure of the mother was treated in such a manner that the face was seen in profile, while the face of the child was exposed to full view. And, again, there was the study from his wife, showing the back of the head and neck, with a suggestion of the cheek, which has been thought by painters to be one of the best bits of technical work he ever did. Ah, what a pleasure to recall those evenings, when all the beautiful works mentioned, besides a dozen or more of superb portraits, were shown together in the master's studio! There were solid, grave old heads of well-known men; maidens in white muslin, with delicate flowers in their hands; and sweet, sad faces of ladies in black, with wonderfully-painted white lace. One of these, the portrait of Mrs. Long, I remember especially as something exquisite in refinement and beauty of execution. And how handsome, grand, and courteous was the host among his guests! To elderly ladies so gentle and patient in explaining, over and over again, the subject of the cartoon,—to the younger ones as gallant as a courtier of King Charles's time,—the brightest among the wits, the most serious among the thinkers and workers!

Towards younger artists Mr. Hunt's bearing was always generous and sympathetic. Elihu Vedder, Albion H. Bicknell, J. Foxcroft Cole, Thomas Robinson, and several other talented young painters, at that time just returned home to Boston from Europe, were his favorite companions, and had studios in the same building with him. Mr. Hunt proved himself a true and valuable friend to them, but his only pupil at this time, properly speaking, was Mr. T. M. J. Johnston, who painted with him, and of whom he was extremely fond, as indeed was every one who knew him, for he was a sweet-natured, gifted, modest man. His early death in Paris, whither he had gone to study, some years later, was a sad loss to the city of Boston. With Mr. Johnston's assistance, Mr. Hunt organized his first class of pupils, giving up the large studio entirely to this purpose, and fitting up two other rooms for himself. Miss Helen M. Knowlton, and several young ladies of high social position who have since achieved considerable distinction in art, were among the first to profit by his instruction. The studies of this class, the formation of which really marks a period in our local art, and was certainly a tremendous step in the right direction, were the sensation in artistic circles before long, and excited much discussion.

In 1867, Mr. Hunt returned to Paris, for the first time since his departure from it in 1855, to visit the International Exhibition. He was an exhibitor in the Fine Arts Department of America, but failed to obtain from the jury on awards any recognition whatever of his work. It has been claimed that his pictures were badly hung, and so separated that they made very little impression. However that may be, Mr. Hunt returned home in no happy mood, it is said, but began working with great vigor. Perhaps had the trial been repeated in 1878, the result would have been different; but he never tried in France again. After the fire in 1872, Mr. Hunt took a studio in the Mason and Hamlin building, where many of his old pupils followed him, working in Miss Knowlton's studio, opposite his own, she having taken his classes. He still continued a constant supervision over their work, and his "Art Talks," gathered and published by Miss Knowlton, were addressed to the pupils studying in this school. During the last two or three years of his life he occupied the fine studio in Park Square, which he constructed at considerable trouble and expense. He was very proud of this studio, and did some splendid work here. The sketches and preparations for the Albany decorations were finished here, as well as the Niagara pictures, and many of his best portraits.

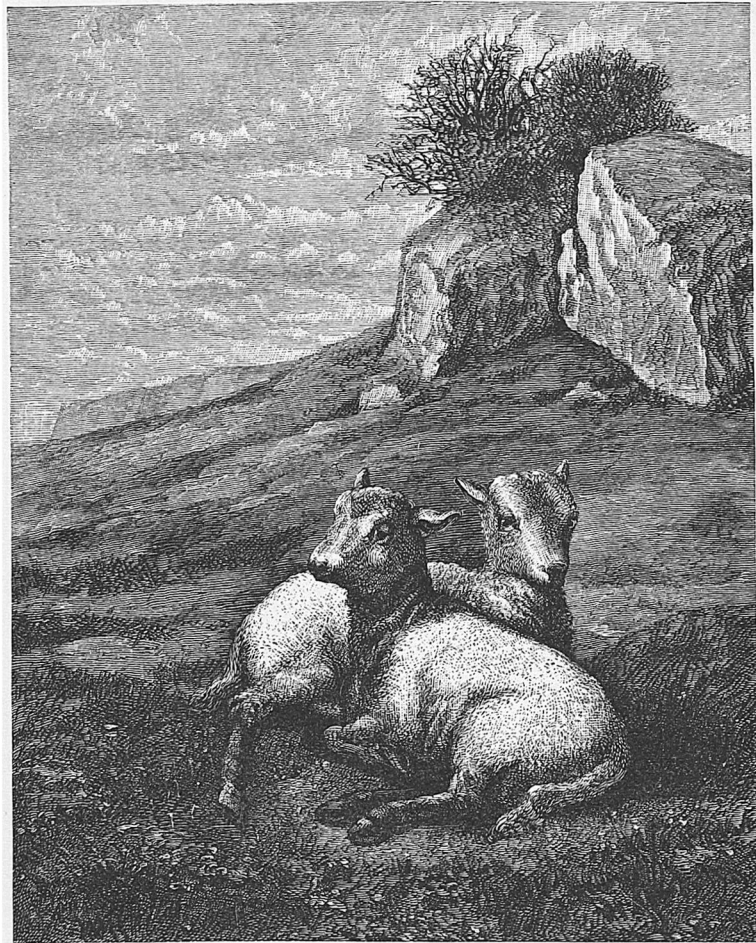
The invitation from the Lieutenant-Governor of the State of New York to paint two great walls in the Senate-Chamber of the new Capitol, was accepted in 1878, and Mr. Hunt began

working in Albany in October of the same year. It is probable that, had he lived and been in sufficiently good health to undertake more such work, it would have been given him to do in the same building. But the great amount of mental and physical strength expended upon these decorations overtaxed his powers of endurance. The time allowed him was very short. Most of the work was prepared and painted by a lime light at night, and executed in about fifty-five days. Mr. Hunt was too nervously inclined, and by no means strong enough to sustain such a strain. He accomplished his task, however, with great honor to himself, and these paintings will remain the grandest illustration of his genius. He finished a few pictures the year following, but it was too evident to his friends that his health was greatly impaired.

He never worked after his last exhibition in the studio which he opened to the public last spring.

Most of the summer was passed at his brother's home in Vermont. The end came at last, as we all know, at the Isles of Shoals, on the 8th of September of this year. Many touching tributes have been paid to his memory, written by loving friends and pupils, to whom the man was even more than his works. America has lost her most distinguished painter; but those whom he honored by his regard will mourn for a great-hearted, loyal friend, whose presence was a constant delight, whose sympathetic voice was one to be always remembered. He loved only the truest and best things in art, and by the aid of his wonderful wit has condensed the wisdom of ages in his talks upon the subject. He made one feel that life contains great possibilities; that art is a divine thing; that the ambition of a painter ought to be, not to gain position, or the applause of critics and society, but to be true to his best and highest aspirations, regardless of praise or censure.

His charity was unbounded, and his deeds of mercy were delicately conceived and executed, in the very spirit of the Great Master. I remember him as he stood beside the grave of poor Le Vasseur, on a chilly day in early spring. He was greatly affected and unable to utter the words, he told us, he intended to say, and which he had written upon a scrap of paper. His bounty had supplied the poor fellow's last days with every comfort. The little colony of Frenchmen in Boston, aided by a few other gentlemen, had contributed the sum of the expenses of a respectable funeral. The church had refused to allow a priest to say a prayer. Not a word was spoken. We all stood waiting respectfully for Mr. Hunt to begin, but he remained motionless, looking intently into the grave, until a general movement was made towards the carriages. I joined him, and we walked some distance in silence, which he broke by saying: "It



THE LAMBS. BY W. M. HUNT.

THE ORIGINAL IN THE POSSESSION OF MRS. GEORGE W. LONG. ENGRAVED BY ANDREW.

gives a fellow an awful shiver to hear the first shovelful of dirt and gravel rattle down upon the coffin; but after it is covered, it falls gently and makes no sound. The feeling of rest is perfect. There's no more 'nagging,' no more pain!"

Some such thoughts must have been working in his brain for a long time. The intense longing for rest became almost imperative, until, says Dr. Bartol in his eloquent sermon, "one morning after there had been rain and thunder and the sky was black, he went once and again to the rim of this little basin, and the second time he did not return; he had slipped in. It may have been an accident or aberration of mind, although I do not like to take out intention from any act or motion of that sure-footed, fine-handed, nicely balanced man."

Enough attention has hardly been paid in this brief sketch, which must necessarily be fragmentary and disjointed, to the many-sided character of Mr. Hunt. The "Art Talks" give a fair idea of the man; but to those who were intimate with him they are but faint reproductions of his style, and those who never saw him in congenial company have lost a pleasure not to be too highly estimated. In appearance not unlike an Arab sheik with his long gray beard and his dark skin, he was the most distinguished-looking man in any company. "An Oriental in the West," Dr. Bartol has called him, — and so he was! All stopped to listen when he spoke, sure of hearing something worth listening to. His mimetic powers were beyond description; and whether it was a man, a bird, or a fish he wished to present to his audience, he imitated the thing so cleverly that the resemblance was sometimes startlingly like. With these qualities, as a matter of course, he was welcome in every society; but his preference was to choose his companions among the unconventional spirits of "Bohemia." His dislike of criticism and fault-finding was intense. He thoroughly enjoyed Whistler's pamphlet on Art and Art Critics, and often said that the so-called *critics* were a nuisance in the community. This feeling sometimes led him to praise rather than to criticise work which he believed to have been done with a sincere desire to achieve something true and good. Perhaps he ought to have been more severe in some cases seeing that his word carried such weight. That he could be severe he was not slow to show when any subject came up which provoked his ire. Perhaps it might be the critic, or the false, gentlemanly art patron, or a conceited piece of mediocrity in the *pose* of an artist or teacher. In such cases his words would come with the force of a mountain torrent.

The illustrations accompanying this paper are of special interest. The portrait, which is most admirably rendered in Mr. Linton's wood-cut, was considered by Mr. Hunt as one of his best successes. One of the smaller cuts shows the artist at work in his old studio in the Mercantile Building; the other, the landscape with the sheep, is a good example of his early work.

I have written, briefly and imperfectly, the story of the master's life as I know it. But the true life of the artist is to be found in his work, and can best be studied in the collection of sketches and paintings brought together in honor of his memory. This collection, as well as the mural decorations at Albany, I shall endeavor to review in another paper.

FREDERIC P. VINTON.

